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FM AMEMBASSY MANAMA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8801
INFO RUEHKK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC PRIORITY
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/06/2019

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SUBJECT: BAHRAIN'S CROWN PRINCE DISCUSSES PEACE PROCESS,
STEPS BAHRAIN IS PREPARED TO TAKE

REF: ERELI-HALE EMAIL OF 07/05/2009

Classified By: Ambassador Adam Ereli for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Ambassador met with Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa on July 6 for a readout of his 7/24-25 discussions in Washington with the President, Vice President, Secretary Clinton, Secretary Gates and others. Sheikh Salman described it as the most important visit he has made to the U.S. as Crown Prince, and spent much of the meeting discussing the peace process. End summary.

¶2. (C) The Crown Prince told Ambassador that based on his discussions in Washington, Bahrain was examining concrete steps that would help advance progress between Israelis and Palestinians. He emphasized the need to reach out directly to the Israeli people with positive gestures. Foreign Minister Sheikh Khalid bin Ahmed intended to find ways to speak directly to the Israeli public, either through the news media, via a satellite hook-up, or even in person.

¶3. (C) Crown Prince Salman also noted that his father, King Hamad, had authorized a team of Bahraini officials from the Foreign and Interior Ministries to fly to Israel on July 3 to repatriate seven Bahraini citizens who had been detained as a result of the "Spirit of Humanity" aid mission to Gaza. The GOB could have sent the delegation to Egypt or Cyprus to meet the detainees, Sheikh Salman pointed out, but decided to take what for them was a bold step on the basis of their discussions in Washington and the conviction that the symbolism of Bahrain officials landing at Ben Gurion sent the right message. Ambassador noted that both Shia and Sunni Islamists in Parliament had harshly denounced the move, but Sheikh Salman replied, "We don't care. We're going to do it (engagement) anyway." (Note: A/DCM spoke to one of the members of that delegation on July 4th. He remarked how professional and courteous his Israeli counterparts were, and was clearly impressed. End note.)

¶4. (C) Salman confirmed refemail's read-out of Jordanian Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh's visit to Bahrain on July 4. Judeh had been sent by King Abdullah to work out a menu of gestures the Arabs states "could give to Obama" in order to help him encourage positive steps from Israel. They agreed that in response to forward movement on settlements, they would be prepared to offer overflight rights, communications links (NFI), and perhaps representative offices at some level. Egypt, he said, would be integral to the process and he believed Qatar and the UAE were on board. (He did worry though about al Jazeera, whose programming could scuttle this diplomacy, if not properly managed.) He assessed that the Saudis are supportive as facilitators because, "they want to give the President a chance."

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